
Hui Malama o ke Kai

Mobilizing to Prevent Youth Violence and Substance Use with Passion, Common Goals, and Culture

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Abstract: The goal of the Hui Malama o ke Kai project was the development of a community-based youth program that supported the prevention of youth violence and substance use among 5th- and 6th-grade students from a predominantly Hawaiian community. This program's development included engaging with a variety of community partners and mobilizing parents through the youths' cultural development. Recommendations for working with Hawaiians and other indigenous peoples include having program evaluators work more intimately with program participants and developing program components that address ethnic identity and family engagement. In doing so, youth programs with indigenous peoples can also galvanize small communities that are coping with destructive social concerns.

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Introduction

Throughout the 19th and most of the 20th centuries, American colonial policies worked vigorously and overtly to dismantle the Hawaiian culture. Laws were changed that attempted to restrict the meaning of family (ohana) so that only nuclear families (as opposed to extended families) were formally recognized, while also disempowering women from exiting violent relationships.¹ Schools—developed and run by Christian missionaries—punished Hawaiian children who spoke their native language and forbade the use of communal teamwork, encouraging instead an individualized learning process.² And in perhaps the most blatant transformation, Hawaiians' land was taken by American capitalists to be used for the agricultural production of sugar—a practice that did not coincide with Hawaiians' reverence for the land (aina) and left the general Hawaiian population owning less than 1% of Hawaii's total land mass.³

These and other radical changes in Hawaiians' society were further complicated by the extensive spread of infectious disease that virtually wiped out the entire Hawaiian population; between 1778 (when the first Western colonists arrived on Hawaii's shores) and 1930, the Hawaiian population declined from approximately

800,000 to 60,000, and by 1976, there were fewer than 8000 full-blooded Hawaiians.^{4–6} In 1898, the Hawaiian government was forcibly ousted at gunpoint by the American military, and presently, the U.S. military owns a greater proportion of Hawaii's land mass than that of any state in the Union.⁷

Clearly, Hawaii's history resembles that of the First Nation Peoples on the continental U.S. And like First Nation Peoples, the indigenous peoples of Hawaii have felt the reverberations of colonialism in multiple facets of their society. The residual effects of colonization, including losing a sense of history and culture, have had deleterious effects on First Nations Peoples in the American upper Midwest, such as a severe increase in alcoholism.⁸ Similarly in Hawaii, with regard specifically to youth violence and substance use, the University of Hawaii Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center found that in a survey of 100 Native Hawaiian teenagers, 42% had engaged in violent behaviors and 49% had used illicit substances within the last six months; for girls, the recent use of illicit substances was particularly high at 57.1%.⁹

Fortunately, not all of Hawaii's history is dismal. As an offshoot of the American civil rights movement, a Hawaiian cultural renaissance emerged in the 1970s, which has sparked a surge in advocacy for land rights.¹⁰

This article will present an overview of the process by which a community- and youth-based organization, known as Hui Malama o ke Kai (HMK—the caring group from the ocean), emerged within the rural and predominantly Hawaiian community of Waimanalo,

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working to mobilize that community in preventing youth violence and attendant risk factors.

Waimanalo, Hawaii

Waimanalo is located approximately 17 miles from Honolulu on the east shore of Oahu, Hawaii's most populated island. Technically, Waimanalo is divided into three census tracts—Waimanalo, Waimanalo Beach, and Waimanalo Home Land, the last of which is considered Hawaiian homestead, where homeowners must prove at least 50% Hawaiian lineage/blood quantum (similar to reservation land for First Nation Peoples in the continental U.S.). The community is relatively small, rural, and comprises 10,963 residents. With 70% of Waimanalo residents being Native Hawaiian, the community as a whole holds one of the highest concentrations of Native Hawaiians in Hawaii.¹¹ The Waimanalo community is also relatively young, with a median age of 32.8 years; 22.2% of all residents are aged between 5 and 19 years.¹¹

While holding a rich array of community and natural resources, Waimanalo also possesses its share of social concerns. Those who live in Waimanalo and/or work with Waimanalo residents know of the disproportionately high number of Hawaiian families that have been fractured by various issues, although family violence and substance use are cited by community leaders as key causal factors. U.S. Census Bureau¹¹ data also show that in 2000 there were 1385 Waimanalo households with at least one person under age 18; of those 1385 households, 30.5% were headed by a single mother or father. Additionally, in comparison to the rest of Hawaii, more than twice the proportion of residents in Waimanalo receive public assistance. Finally, research¹² has shown that 20.5% of all 12th graders attending the high school that serves the Waimanalo community require treatment for alcohol abuse or dependence.

Waimanalo residents continue to struggle with the loss of cultural identity. The cultural values that Hawaiians promoted were devalued, and Hawaiians' sense of who they were was lost. This disparaging cultural dynamic has led to concerns over youth violence in other rural Hawaiian communities,¹³ and community leaders feel that it has also added to the number of Hawaiian adults in Waimanalo who are addicted to drugs and/or incarcerated.

Antecedents to Community Mobilization

This combination of concerns led a group of Waimanalo community leaders to develop HMK, an after-school program for Waimanalo 5th- and 6th-grade students, which developed and evolved from a grassroots, unfunded youth program, to one that currently receives federal support but still engages community members as a means of perpetuating the Hawaiian culture and prosocial community change.

In 1998, before beginning a formalized and collaborative effort to reduce youth violence and substance use in Waimanalo, individual community leaders had attempted to address these issues through sign campaigns that emphasized the need for a nonviolent and drug-free community. As individual community members and agencies realized that any fractured or quick-fix efforts were ineffective in reaching the entire community for a sustained time period, an interest in working collaboratively began.

Representatives from the Queen Liliuokalani Children's Center in Waimanalo, Parks and Recreation, a lifeguard from the City and County of Honolulu, and individuals who had close ties with the two elementary schools serving Waimanalo youth formed a more unified coalition.¹⁴ Most of these organizers were of Hawaiian ancestry, and all had a vested interest in working to improve the lives of Waimanalo's youth; they viewed their work in creating the HMK organization as something that would be volunteer work so that the program could survive without government funding, if necessary.

During two structured training conferences, participants envisioned how an after-school program could spark community change; they agreed that such a program would not only occupy youths' time after school and offer educational assistance, but also provide for a timeframe in the latter part of the day when youth could tap into Hawaiian cultural activities. Decisions on organizing the program were made in formal but casual group meetings, which are common in rural Hawaiian communities.

The Community Mobilization Project: Hui Malama o ke Kai

The HMK program was structured so that youth participants would take part in a study-hall tutoring session immediately after school, and then engage in fun recreational, often times ocean-based, activities with staff afterwards. However, these activities would also resurrect Hawaiian cultural values and illustrate for youth participants these values' importance through experiential learning. Due to the schools' location in Waimanalo, virtually all youth participants are of Native Hawaiian ancestry.

Hui Malama o ke Kai is a yearlong program that runs from October through the end of each academic year. HMK's first cycle of 30 students was recruited in 1999 from two elementary schools. Starting in 2003, the HMK began enrolling 40 students per year in the program. Parents apply for their child(ren) to be part of HMK. Youth participants who show a variety of risk levels (e.g., engagement in fighting and/or substance use) are deliberately chosen so that higher-risk participants are positively influenced by both low-risk peers and the HMK staff. Since its inception in 1999, Hui

Malama o ke Kai has provided direct service to approximately 350 Waimanalo youth and families.

Early Development

Early development included the recruitment of a life-guard and the provision of vans. Elementary school officials supported the new program and assisted in youth participant recruitment by referring students they felt would benefit.

Early community mobilizers had shown a strong commitment and were motivated by hopes of benefiting youth and families, and promoting positive community change. Although HMK did acquire federal funding years later, mobilizers never envisioned the program as one that would depend on federal funding or offer personal chances for financial growth. Therefore, agendas were characterized strictly by a desire to decrease youth violence and substance use. Mobilizers' distinct roles became especially clear when a Hawaiian preacher blessed the HMK program and spoke about the critical roles the mobilizers played. Symbolically, one participant represented the program's mouth, another the feet, another the hands, another the head, and so on, emphasizing the necessity of all the parts to make the HMK "body" function. The program could not have been envisioned, let alone established, without the combination of people that worked together and brought different skills, resources, visionary goals, and senses of passion to the program.

Program Components and Services

Community mobilizers recognized the need to provide Waimanalo youth and residents with the tools to succeed in their intimate local community and in urban Honolulu. It was decided that these tools should be ones they could call their own and be proud of, and which were already in the community. From a conceptual standpoint, this would give the community ownership over the HMK program and raise community empowerment.

The Hawaiian cultural element quickly became an integral part of the HMK recreational program activities. The greater geographic diversity of Waimanalo was incorporated as a resource. Participants were engaged in stream restoration activities and taught to see the ocean and land not as two separate entities, but rather shown experientially that they were part of a connected system that should be preserved.

These types of culture-based programmatic components led HMK to be founded on four principles and aim to strengthen youths' protective/resiliency factors through a holistic approach: (1) *Hanai i ke kamalii* (grow, nurture, and love the child); (2) *Hooikaika i ka ohana* (strengthen the family); (3) *Hookahua ia Waimanalo* (developing, planting seeds in Waimanalo); and (4) *Ao i kapoe ma waho o Waimanalo* (teaching, learning

about, and sharing our experiences of our program with communities outside Waimanalo). By working with all of these principles, HMK hopes to give the youth back their Hawaiian identity and with that, their self-esteem and hope for a bright future.

A typical after-school session in HMK includes: (1) academic tutoring for approximately 1 hour; (2) off-campus activities at the beach or a hiking area, tying the activity into Hawaiian culture (e.g., the value of *laulima* [teamwork]) through a positive physical activity; (3) a snack; and (4) a summary reminding students of the day's culturally based lesson.

Looking to the Community as a Resource

Several approaches were taken to include the community.

1. Older "aunties" (namely Waimanalo grandmothers) made meals for youth for their after-school activities, which helped to connect Hawaiian elders to the HMK program and offered an opportunity to teach youth participants about the Hawaiian cultural value of respecting responsible elders and one's extended family.
2. To further unite the community around the issues of youth violence and substance use prevention, small businesses in the Waimanalo area were recruited to support the program. Over the years of the program, these small contributions grew in significance; business owners could see their generosity helping to build a movement that supported healthy youthful development.
3. HMK staff and students make themselves visible in the community through participation in community events and activities that give back to and improve Waimanalo, by attending meetings and partaking in external community service program activities, such as mural painting and beach clean-ups.

The community is more willing to be involved in the HMK program when they see the difference in multiple facets of Waimanalo. In short, another key element of using HMK as an agent of community mobilization to prevent youth risk is ensuring that the program stands out as a community service program that improves Waimanalo.

Leadership

An attitude of not being afraid to fail in community collaborations has helped HMK's core leadership avoid burn-out and has minimized staff turnover. However, HMK's leaders also realized that significant community change would not transpire without greater family involvement.

Focusing on Families

Program leaders knew that adolescent peer violence and substance use often emerged as unhealthy coping mechanisms in response to family breakup and/or conflict. Recognizing that a cohesive extended family is a fundamental aspect of the Hawaiian culture, HMK has recently broadened its program components to include parents and extended family members.

Previously, HMK staff had hoped that by fostering positive aspects of the Hawaiian culture into their 5th- and 6th-grade students, youth would take these values home to be disseminated to their parents and siblings. Although these strategies are still employed, HMK staff now also hold family nights, where parents and/or close adult family members can interact with staff to learn more about the program, the cultural values taught, and how those values enhance a nonviolent and drug-free community.

At these family nights, parents are also provided with a forum to talk about their own parenting issues and connect with other parents to see that they are not alone in their struggles and successes. In addition to this family-bonding component, HMK now offers a family retreat at the beginning of each program year, in which each participating youth and two significant older family members may go on a structured weekend camping trip to a neighbor Hawaiian island. While at the retreat, program youth, parents, and staff work together on culturally appropriate activities that help to replenish the *aina*, such as restoring *opae ula* ponds (Hawaiian Red Shrimp ponds). During the evening, at facilitated parent sessions, HMK staff talk collectively with groups of parents about coping with familial substance use, family and community violence, and how to address these concerns with their children.

Although the family-based activities described above may appear to be simple descriptions of programmatic components, HMK staff also view them as critical agents of community change and mobilization. They enhance the community ownership of HMK and, in turn, break the cycle of violence and neglect that affects too many Waimanalo families. These family-based activities also build a stronger and more cohesive community outreach effort.

Programmatic and Evaluation Challenges

As HMK has grown since its inception in 1998, it has encountered its share of challenges. As the program's client base grew, volunteer high school tutors were brought in for the after-school tutorial sessions. These volunteers, although well intentioned, lacked adequate training in educational programming, especially for a program that soon served 40 youth each weekday afternoon. The high turnover of these volunteers be-

came a drain on the regular staff, who were underpaid themselves.

As HMK matured and began securing state and federal funding, program staff also became less connected to their original principles of providing for youth and working with the community. Although it was beneficial to have additional money to pay staff and secure an office and equipment, there were administrative requirements that the HMK staff was not prepared to fulfill. The program jumped from approximately 15 to 40 youth and from 3 to 5 days per week. Reportable results became important; maintaining different types of records and bookkeeping emerged as issues that previously did not exist to such a large degree. Occasionally, community members would question what HMK was doing with their newly acquired grant money. And finally, there have been times when HMK's efforts to mobilize Waimanalo were stymied by community concerns regarding the number of Waimanalo youth served. Essentially, with increased financial resources, some community members questioned whether funding should be spread more thinly to a larger number of youth and families or to maintain HMK's current approach, which offers heavier services to 40 youth and families per session. It has been crucial for HMK staff to speak with community leaders and residents at neighborhood board meetings about their philosophical approach on a regular basis. This has become an important lesson learned—that program staff must continue keeping community residents abreast of programmatic approaches, in particular when funding is acquired.

In addition, because HMK was so entrenched in cultural programming and community engagement, formal evaluators needed to be hired who could more effectively perform the administrative tasks required by funding agencies and relieve the program staff to re-focus on working with the community. Still, HMK's evaluators also voluntarily interact with HMK program staff, youth, and parent clients on a regular basis, to develop a trusting rapport with all parties involved (e.g., HMK evaluators attend parent nights and family-based retreats).

With these relationships nurtured between evaluators and program participants, family nights and retreats prove to be a more valuable assessment tool for the staff, as they are able to view more honest and open interactions of the parents and children. Moreover, parents and youth feel more comfortable giving their candid suggestions on program development and mobilization strategies to evaluators. Such a relationship, sometimes viewed by Western evaluation standards as inappropriate, is seen as a necessary element of evaluation within this predominantly Hawaiian context, where eliciting honest information requires significant relationship building.

As the program staff has reflected, views on “best practices” for their youth participants include an ongoing examination of what works in terms of program components. At the most fundamental level, however, this means integrating activities that (1) attend to nurturing a positive ethnic identity and (2) integrate the family. For instance, working with youth to establish an ethnic identity rooted in values that appreciate the land and ocean, that promote service to others, and that appreciate cooperation, and marking those qualities as part of the traditional Hawaiian culture was only a first step. A second and equally critical step included outreach to family members, such that the extended family was actively included in program activities, albeit on a less frequent basis. In turn, family connectedness was promoted (a foremost Hawaiian value in itself), and families could discuss the disruptive effects of issues such as violence and drug use on the positive aspects of Hawaiian culture.

Although not the focal point of this article, internal evaluations have shown the HMK program to be effective in reaching its goals. From a quantitative standpoint, pre- and post-test surveys are administered to youth participants. Results from these evaluation studies have shown significant positive improvement in youth appreciation for the Hawaiian culture and improved attitudes that disapprove of substance use and violent behaviors. Open-ended qualitative questions are also included in evaluation instruments, which have also yielded positive comments from both youth and parents. Parents, for example, have reported improved attitudes and behaviors in their children since their participation in HMK.

Conclusion

A deep cultural competence, awareness, and sensitivity is crucial when working with Native Hawaiians, and when mobilizing toward the issues of youth violence and substance use prevention. In the Waimanalo community, it was crucial to take the historical ways in which Hawaiian culture has been degraded and turn them around so that Hawaiians’ positive cultural elements were emphasized in programming activities. In doing so, HMK staff have been able to develop a youth program and initiate a mobilization effort that includes elders, local businesses, and families.

The development of future youth programs with indigenous peoples should also include program components that shift the ways in which youth view their culture and ethnic identities. Simply providing tutoring services, sports activities, and staff who also come from the same demographic backgrounds is not enough. It is also crucial that programs tackle deeper topics that allow youth to see how their culture holds positive

dimensions that can enable them to succeed in present society. In addition, the academic community needs to better educate itself on expanding the ways that ethnic identity is measured, and on developing evaluation methods that allow for evaluators to develop personal relationships with program clients. As in HMK, youth and parents would be less likely to provide accurate information to evaluators if they did not first develop a trusting rapport.

And finally, it is important to mention that HMK started as community mobilization effort. Community leaders knew what they wanted and needed. They partnered with other community groups and implemented a youth violence and substance use prevention program that they—as a community—conceived. They did not need a formal needs assessment or extensive funding or a board of directors. But they did need passion, common goals, and the vision to use the Hawaiian culture as an asset that would engage community members to build a healthy Waimanalo.

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